

READING PRACTICES IN A Digital World



The State Library of WA presented a lecture by Dr Vivian Howard, Associate Professor in the School of Information Management at Dalhousie University (Canada), on 26 June to an enthusiastic audience of 50. 'Reading Practices in a Digital World: Two case studies', was a collaboration between InfoSci@ECU (Edith Cowan University's occasional seminar series on research in LIS) and ALIAWest. It provided ALIAWest members with a great opportunity to learn from a visiting academic whose research focuses on literacy and young people.

The first case study looked at parents' and caregivers' perceptions of reading apps for preschool children. While there is a positive perception of reading apps, reading traditional books trumps them in developing literacy. Reading apps may be useful if they 'reinforce early literacy skills' and focus on the story, but they need to be carefully selected. This is where public libraries can be involved. The bells and whistles in reading apps are just a distraction from the story.

The second case study raised interesting questions about building communities. With the slogan, 'Read the same book, share the same story', One Book Nova Scotia (1BNS.ca) was started in 2012 with the aim of having adults reading and discussing the same book to help develop a reading culture

and sense of community. As well as various events, a Twitter feed was organised. While Twitter did provide information, it was not a particularly effective source for discussion or engagement for participants. Surveys in 2012 and 2013 indicated that most participants were female, well educated, aged between 50 and 59, and what appeared to be fairly typical public library users. One Book Nova Scotia attracted people interested in literature, but not people who do not normally go to a public library. It was apparent that they need to be a specific focus of advertising and promotion to develop one community. Recommendations on improving the reading program are detailed in 'Creating Cohesive Community Through Shared Reading: A case study of One Book Nova Scotia' published in *Partnership: The Canadian journal of library and information practice and research* (<http://bit.ly/1gGdRsJ>).

Many thanks to Yusuke Ishimura, the ALIAWest committee, and Noreen Kirkman, WA State Manager, for working together to make this event a success. Our thanks to Dr Howard for sharing her current research with us.

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ALIA MEMBER REPORTS BACK

As one of her former students, I was delighted when Dr Vivian Howard delivered her lecture. She has a keen interest in the reading habits of children and young adults – central themes in her teaching and research. I have fond memories of her extensive collection of children’s literature housed in the School of Information Management at Dalhousie University, where it was common to see students reading books from her collection for their studies and for their own enjoyment.

As an educator in LIS, I was able to focus on how Vivian’s presentation provided insights for LIS students. Our discipline has evolved with technological changes and the two case studies raised important questions to consider: the relationship between reading practices and technological changes; and the promotion of reading practice and connecting people using social media. Instead of avoiding technology, it is our mission to understand how technological innovation changes people’s lives. The first case study demonstrated evidence of technological change on society. Improving children’s literacy is a core aim of our profession. The confusion and anxiety expressed by parents in the area of reading apps clearly suggest that LIS course content

should reflect technological needs and go beyond simply introducing print books.

Vivian’s second case study looked at One Book Nova Scotia – an initiative to build a reading community. It had a fundamental message for future information professionals: to deliver an effective program, it is important to think about the purpose, strategies to achieve that purpose, and an assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies. Use of social media is a good solution to reach, and interact with, users, but as this case study demonstrated, without well-developed planning and strategies, success is not guaranteed. Social media is not a goal in itself; it has to be used as a tool to achieve a larger purpose. This is a message that I emphasise to my students, and it was great to see how Vivian’s case study backed this up. Vivian’s lecture was not only enjoyable, but it was also valuable for future information professionals.

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